Indicators of Children's Well-Being

Special Section

This year's special section is *Family Structure and Children's Well-Being*. It provides family structure breakouts for five indicators selected from the Population and Family Characteristics, Health, and Education sections of *America's Children*.

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2005

Family Structure and Children's Well-Being

Children are born into and grow up in a variety of family structures. Research using a range of data sets and analytic approaches consistently shows that children's well-being is associated with family structure, usually defined as the number, type, and marital status of parents or guardians.[132] Research shows that a wide range of other factors also contribute to child outcomes, and that most children have positive outcomes in a number of different family structures. *America's Children* includes family structure as both an indicator (POP6.A and POP6.B) and as a breakout for several economic and education indicators (e.g., ECON1.A, ECON.2, ED.1, and ED.2). This special section further illustrates the associations between family structure and child well-being. Future volumes of *America's Children* will include breakouts by family structure for additional indicators, as well. These efforts carry on the Forum's work to improve measures of family structure across the Federal statistical system.

Analyzing data by family structure is a complex task for many reasons. First, classifying family types is difficult. Most current surveys do not collect detailed data on the relationships of all household members to one another. Second, most surveys do not collect historical data on changes in family structure over time. Third, the Federal statistical system does not have a standard in place that consistently characterizes family structure. Fourth, family structure has strong statistical associations with other factors related to child well-being, such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. It is often difficult to disentangle the individual effects of each factor. Fifth, while family structure may affect child well-being, the characteristics of children may in turn affect family structure.[133] Lastly, group differences do not predict individual outcomes. Thus, the relationships between family structure and children's well-being are complex, and not all associations represent causal effects.

This special section presents five examples of indicators broken out by family structure. The two infant well-being indicators—low birthweight and infant mortality—use the measures and data sources currently reflected in HEALTH5 and HEALTH6, and are presented by birthmother's marital status. This is the one measure of family structure available in data provided by the National Vital Statistics System. The three adolescent indicators—school enrollment, health, and unmarried teen motherhood—utilize the same data source used in indicators POP6.B and POP8.B (the Survey of Income and Program Participation, or SIPP). The data presented show that associations between family structure and these child outcomes generally persist within groups defined by race and ethnicity, mother's age, and family income.

Family Structure and Infant Well-Being

I n 2002, 66 percent of all births were to married mothers, and 34 percent were to unmarried mothers. Figures SPECIAL4.A and SPECIAL4.B show differences in rates of low birthweight and infant mortality between infants born to married and unmarried mothers.[135] Birthweight is one of the most important predictors of an infant's survival chances. In 2002, low birthweight babies (8 percent of all babies) made up two-thirds of all infant deaths.[136] Low birthweight births are defined as infants less than 2,500 grams, or 5 lb. 8 oz., and very low birthweight births are defined as infants less than 1,500 grams, or 3 lb. 4 oz. Infant mortality rate is defined as deaths before first birthday in a calendar year divided by 1,000 live births during the same period.

| Figure SPECIAL4.A | Percentage of low and very low birthweight births by birthmother's marital status, 2002 |
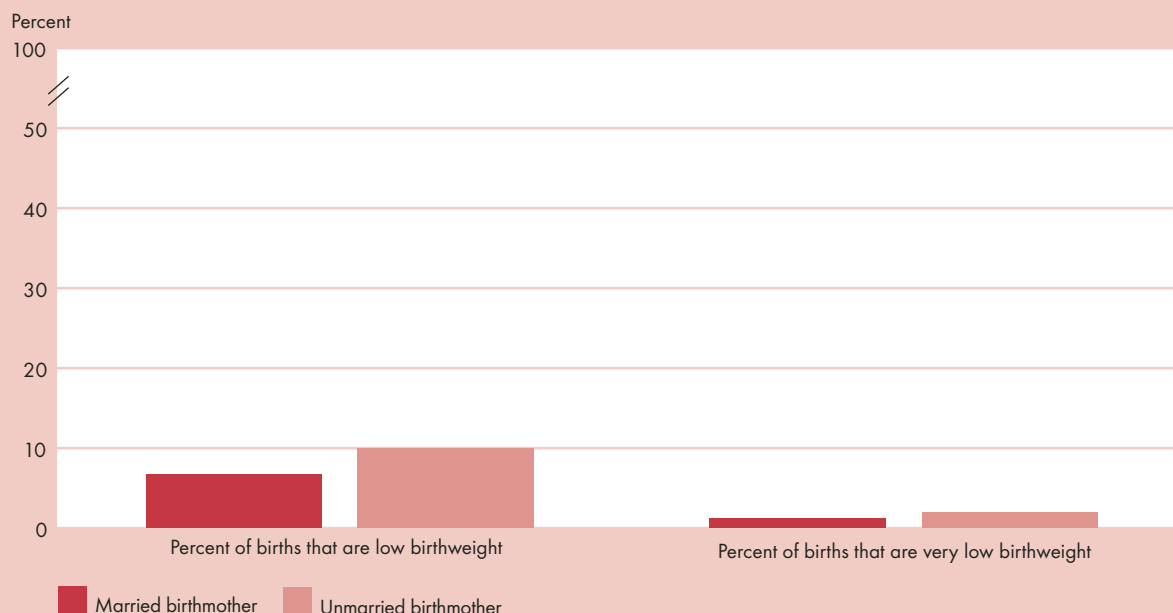
NOTE: Percentage of low birthweight births for married birthmothers is significantly different from that for unmarried birthmothers (.05 level); likewise, percentage of very low birthweight births for married birthmothers is significantly different from that for unmarried birthmothers (.05 level). Mother's marital status is captured at the time of birth by a direct question on birth certificates in 48 states and DC (Michigan and New York use an inferential procedure to determine marital status, and are included with the other 48 states and DC).

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System.

## Low and very low birthweight births

- In 2002, 7 percent of births to married mothers were low birthweight, compared with 10 percent of births to unmarried mothers. In the same year, 1 percent of births to married mothers were very low birthweight, compared with 2 percent of births to unmarried mothers.
- Babies born to unmarried mothers are more likely to be low birthweight than those born to married mothers, both overall and for each racial and ethnic group. In 2002, 6 percent of infants born to married White, non-Hispanic birthmothers were low birthweight, compared to 9 percent of infants born to unmarried birthmothers in the same group. The pattern of low-birthweight rates for

Black, non-Hispanic mothers was similar, with unmarried mothers having higher rates: 12 percent for married mothers, and 14 percent for unmarried mothers. Similarly, the low-birthweight rate for married Hispanic mothers was 6 percent, and for unmarried Hispanic mothers, it was 7 percent.

- Across all age groups, married birthmothers have a lower rate of low birthweight births than unmarried birthmothers. For example, in 2002, 7 percent of infants born to married birthmothers ages 20–24 were low birthweight, compared with 9 percent of infants born to unmarried birthmothers ages 20–24.

Infant deaths per 1,000 live births
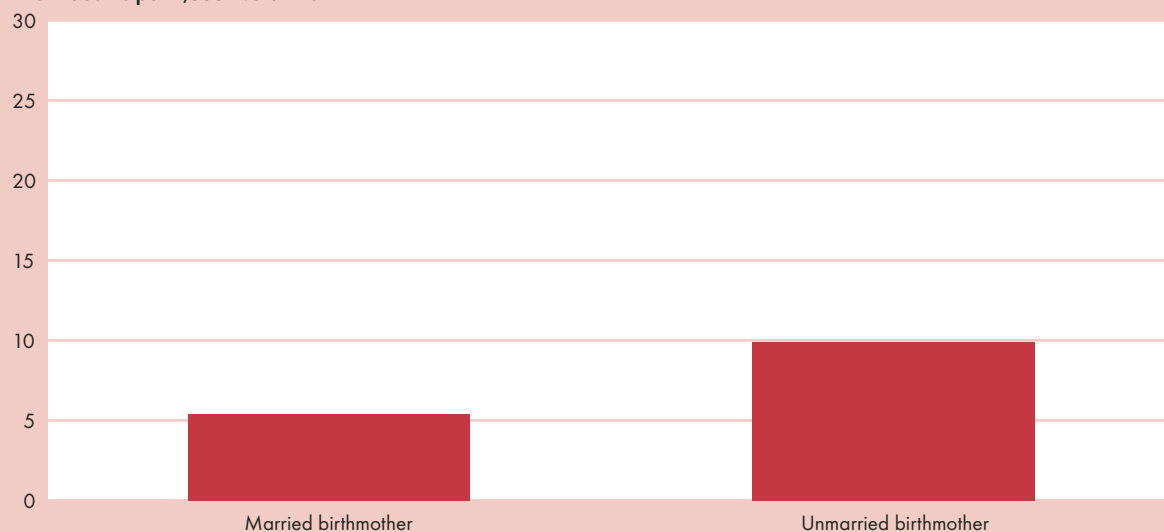
NOTE: Rate for infants of married birthmothers is significantly different from rate for infants of unmarried birthmothers (.05 level). Mother's marital status is captured at the time of birth by a direct question on birth certificates in 48 states and DC (Michigan and New York use an inferential procedure to determine marital status, and are included with the other 48 states and DC).

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System.

Infant mortality

■ In 2002, the mortality rate for infants born to married mothers was 5 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared with 10 per 1,000 live births for infants born to unmarried mothers.

■ The infant mortality rate is higher for unmarried birthmothers, both overall and for each racial and ethnic group. In 2002, the infant mortality rate was 5 deaths per 1,000 live births for White, non-Hispanic married birthmothers and 9 deaths per 1,000 live births for unmarried birthmothers of that group. The corresponding rates for Black, non-Hispanic birthmothers were 12 and 15; for Hispanic birthmothers, the rates were 5 and 6.

■ Across all age groups, infant mortality rates are lower for married birthmothers than for unmarried birthmothers. For example, in 2002, the infant mortality rate was 6 deaths per 1,000 live births among married birthmothers ages 20–24, and 10 deaths per 1,000 live births among unmarried birthmothers of this age group.
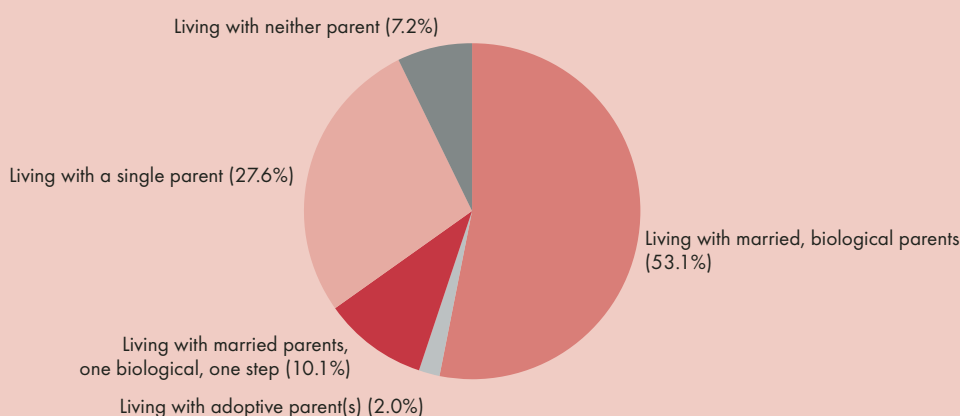
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables SPECIAL4.A and SPECIAL4.B on pages 167–168. Endnotes begin on page 73.

Family Structure and Adolescent Well-Being

Adolescents ages 15–17 live in many different family arrangements. The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal survey with national panels introduced every 3 to 4 years, provides a unique opportunity to examine detailed family structures. The following analyses illustrate that most adolescents in all family structures were enrolled in school and were reported to be in excellent or very good health, and that most adolescent girls in all family structures did not become unmarried teen birthmothers. Note that, in the following figures, the "single parent" group includes children living with a single biological parent and a cohabiter (whether a biological parent or not), a single biological parent and one or more adult relatives, or a single biological parent without other adults.[137] The "neither parent" group includes children living with relatives, as well as those living alone or with nonrelatives. The bullets below and on the following pages describe significant differences between adolescents living with married, biological parents and adolescents living in other arrangements.[138]

Figure SPECIAL4.C **Percentage of adolescents ages 15–17 living in various family arrangements, 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels**

Living with neither parent (7.2%)

Living with a single parent (27.6%)

Living with married, biological parents (53.1%)

Living with married parents, one biological, one step (10.1%)

Living with adoptive parent(s) (2.0%)

NOTE: The 1996 and 2001 panels from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) were combined for the purposes of these analyses.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 and 2001 panels.

■ Combined data from the 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels indicate that 53 percent of adolescents ages 15–17 were living with two married, biological parents, 2 percent with adoptive parent(s), 10 percent with two married parents (one biological and one step), 28 percent with a single parent, and 7 percent with neither parent.

Percentage of adolescents ages 15–17 enrolled in school by family structure, 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels
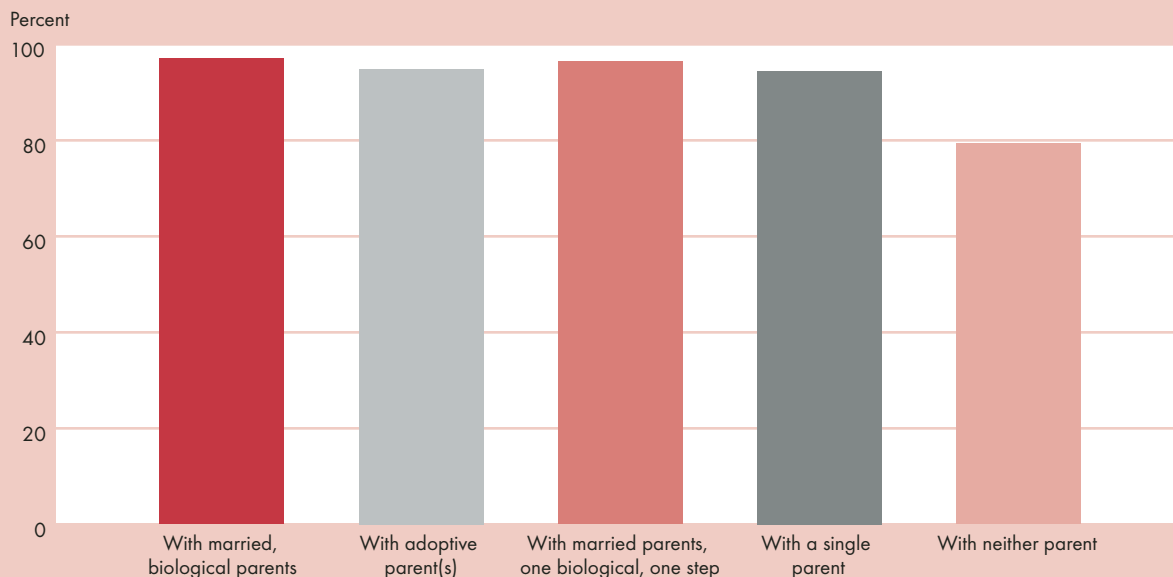
NOTE: Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is significantly different from percentage for those with a single parent and with neither parent (.05 level). Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is not significantly different from percentage for those with adoptive parent(s) or a stepparent. The 1996 and 2001 panels from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) were combined for the purposes of these analyses.
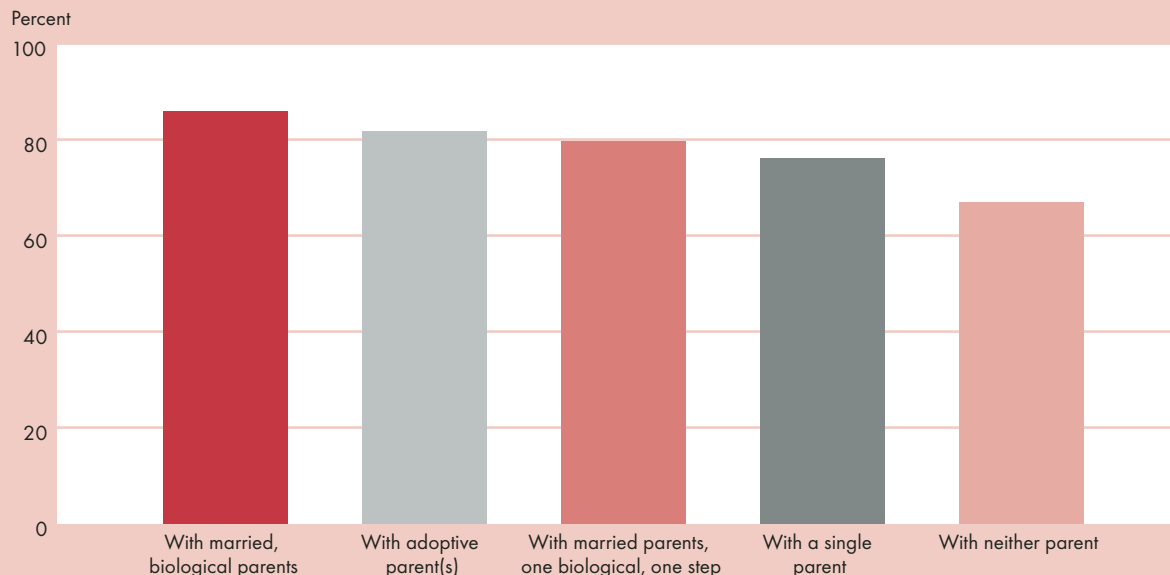
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 and 2001 panels.

Adolescent school enrollment

■ Combined data from the 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels show that 95 percent of adolescents ages 15–17 were enrolled in school. For those adolescents ages 15–17 living with their married, biological parents, 97 percent were enrolled in school, compared with 94 percent of those living with a single parent, and 79 percent of those not living with either parent.

■ Overall, 97 percent of adolescents ages 15–17 whose family's income was more than twice the poverty line were enrolled in school. Among adolescents whose family's income was more than twice the poverty line, 98 percent of those living with their married biological parents were enrolled in school, compared with 96 percent of those living with a single parent, and 82 percent of those not living with either parent.[139]

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables SPECIAL4.C and SPECIAL4.D on pages 169–170. Endnotes begin on page 73.

Percentage of adolescents ages 15–17 reported to be in excellent or very good health by family structure, 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels

Percent

NOTE: Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is significantly different from percentage for those with a stepparent, with a single parent, and with neither parent (.05 level). Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is not significantly different from percentage for those with adoptive parent(s). The 1996 and 2001 panels from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) were combined for the purposes of these analyses.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 and 2001 panels.

Adolescent health reports

■ Combined data from the 1996 and 2001 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) panels show that 81 percent of adolescents ages 15–17 were reported to be in excellent or very good health. Eighty-six percent of adolescents ages 15–17 who lived with their biological married parents were reported to be in excellent or very good health, compared with 80 percent of those living with two married parents (one biological and one step), 76 percent of those living with a single parent, and 67 percent of those not living with either parent.

■ Overall, 84 percent of adolescents ages 15–17 whose family's income was more than twice the poverty line were reported to be in excellent or very good health. Among adolescents ages 15–17 whose family's income was more than twice the poverty line, the report of excellent or very good health status remained highest for those that lived with their married, biological parents (87 percent). In contrast, 81 percent of adolescents living with two married parents (one biological and one step), 79 percent of those living with a single parent, and 69 percent of those not living with either parent were reported to enjoy excellent or very good health.

Percentage of adolescent girls, by family structure at ages 15–17, who became unmarried birthmothers by ages 17–19, 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels
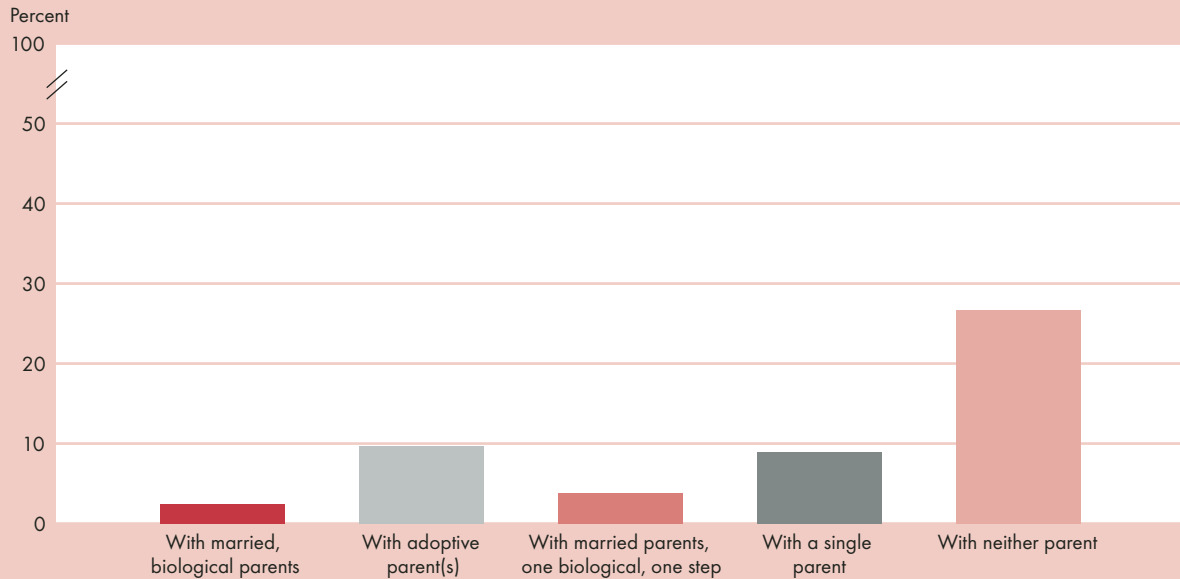
NOTE: Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is significantly different from percentage for those with a single parent and with neither parent (.05 level). Percentage for adolescents with married, biological parents is not significantly different from percentage for those with adoptive parent(s) or a stepparent. Family structure was measured in 1996 and 2001, at ages 15–17; data on unmarried motherhood was collected over the two succeeding years. The 1996 and 2001 panels from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) were combined for the purposes of these analyses.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 and 2001 panels.

Unmarried teen birthmothers

- Combined data from the 1996 and 2001 SIPP panels show that 6 percent of all girls ages 15–17 became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19. Among girls ages 15–17 who lived with their biological married parents at the start of the survey, 2 percent became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19, compared with 9 percent of those who lived with a single parent, and 27 percent of those who did not live with either parent.

- Overall, 3 percent of girls ages 15–17 whose family's income was more than twice the poverty line became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19. The rate was 2 percent among girls living with married, biological parents, 7 percent among girls living with a single parent, and 22 percent among girls not living with either parent.

- Differences in unmarried teen motherhood by family structure persist for each racial and ethnic group. Among White, non-Hispanic girls ages 15–17 who lived with both married, biological parents, 2 percent became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19, compared with 5 percent of those who lived with a single parent, and 23 percent of those who did not live with either parent. Among Black, non-Hispanic girls ages 15–17 who lived with both biological married parents, 6 percent became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19, compared with 13 percent of those who lived with a single parent, and 25 percent of those who did not live with either parent. Among Hispanic girls ages 15–17 who lived with both biological married parents, 5 percent became unmarried mothers by ages 17–19, compared with 18 percent of those who lived with a single parent, and 42 percent of those who did not live with either parent.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables SPECIAL4.E and SPECIAL4.F on pages 171–172. Endnotes begin on page 73.